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# CASSIUS DIO'S AGRIPPA-MAECENAS DEBATE: AN OPERATIONAL CODE ANALYSIS

ERIC ADLER



*Abstract.* This article discusses Cassius Dio's political thought in his Agrippa-Maecenas debate (52.2–40) through the use of a form of content analysis developed by political scientists called "operational code analysis." It offers a description of operational code analysis, which demonstrates the value of this method to the debate. It then presents an examination of Dio's operational code, from which one can glean his philosophical and instrumental views on politics. It argues, *inter alia*, that the Agrippa address is based on the same epistemological foundations as the Maecenean corollary. Further, the article stresses that the Agrippa oration remains consistent with views Dio expresses elsewhere in his history. This suggests that scholars should not discount the efficacy of the Agrippa oration, despite its utopian character.

## I. EXPANDING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE DEBATE

CLASSICAL SCHOLARS HAVE LONG VIEWED CASSIUS DIO'S famous Agrippa-Maecenas debate (52.2–40)<sup>1</sup> as the most interesting portion of his *Historia Romana*.<sup>2</sup> As a result, this lengthy dialogue, set in 29 B.C.E., has received more scholarly attention than any other aspect of Dio's work.<sup>3</sup> The debate features Octavian's advisors counseling disparate courses of action, now that the man who would become Rome's first emperor

<sup>1</sup>The book numbers and text of Dio used for this article are from Boissevain 1895–1931. For citations from Books 61–80, the standard numeration appears in parentheses beside Boissevain's revised numbers. All translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup>According to Schwartz 1899, 1719, for example, the Maecenas oration in the debate amounts to the only speech in Dio's history worthy of much attention.

<sup>3</sup>Discussions of this debate are legion. See, e.g., Meyer 1891; Jardé 1925, 26–32; Hammond 1932; Gabba 1955, 311–25, and 1962; Bleicken 1962; Millar 1964, 102–18; Berrigan 1968; van Stekelenburg 1971, 110–16; Manuwald 1979, 21–25; McKechnie 1981; Espinosa Ruiz 1982; Zawadzki 1983; Fechner 1986, 71–86; Reinhold 1988, 165–210; Steidle 1988, 203–11; Fishwick 1990; Smyshlyayev 1991; Kuhlmann 2010. Scholars have typically shown greater interest in the Maecenas speech (especially in regard to its specific proposals for political reform) than its Agrippan corollary.

had taken control of the state. Dio's Agrippa offers a brief in favor of democracy (2–13); to him, Octavian ought to restore the Roman Republic. The historian's Maecenas favors monarchy and lays out a remarkably specific political program for the aspiring ruler. The debate thus allows Dio both to present theoretical ruminations on politics and to suggest pragmatic reforms for the Roman state. It serves as a unique opportunity to determine the political inclinations of an influential senator from the high Empire.

Despite its age, in many ways Meyer's 1891 dissertation, *De Maecenatis oratione a Dione ficta*, continues to set the intellectual parameters for the modern study of this debate. This remains the case despite the fact that many classicists have disagreed with aspects of Meyer's analysis; his perception that the Maecenas address demonstrates Dio's anti-senatorial stance appears particularly unpopular.<sup>4</sup> Yet Meyer asked the sorts of questions about the debate that have continued to occupy scholars for over a century. In part as a result of his work's influence, classicists have focused much of their attention, for instance, on the date of the debate's composition, the pedigree of the ideas it advances, and Dio's rationale for including it in his history.

These naturally remain significant concerns. But, given the overall importance of the Agrippa-Maecenas debate (according to Reinhold it is "the only theoretical analysis of Roman government and society from the third century"),<sup>5</sup> it may prove valuable to examine other substantive issues that pertain to it. This seems particularly likely because many conclusions Meyer and other scholars have stressed hinge on the year in which Dio wrote the debate, and ultimately we possess insufficient evidence to fix its date of composition with real authority.<sup>6</sup> Under the circumstances, it

<sup>4</sup>For this contention, which Meyer links to Dio's supposed criticism of Alexander Severus, see Meyer 1891, 80–93. For criticism of this view, see Gabba 1955, 314–15; Millar 1964, 102–4; Reinhold 1988, 182. According to Bleicken 1962, 467, Alexander Severus' rule was not a return to a pro-senatorial policy.

<sup>5</sup>Reinhold 1988, 165. According to Starr 1952, 12, the debate "shed more light on the nature of the Empire than any other single source."

<sup>6</sup>Scholars have proposed disparate dates of composition for the debate, all of which seem possible, to a greater or lesser extent. E.g., Bleicken 1962, 446, Bowersock 1972, 202–3, and Smyshlyayev 1991, 142 (222–235 C.E.); Millar 1964, 104 (the end of 214 C.E.); Barnes 1984, 250 (222–223 C.E.); Espinosa Ruiz 1982, 488 (222 C.E. as the *terminus ante quem*); Zawadzki 1983, 278 (214–229 C.E.); Reinhold 1988, 181 (who suggests any time from 211 to 222 C.E.). Fishwick 1990, 274–75, reasonably concludes that we cannot be certain when Dio wrote the debate. According to Smyshlyayev 1991, 140, the dating of the debate "in a way determines its interpretation."

may be useful to investigate the Agrippa-Maecenas debate by means of a fresh approach.

According to Zawadzki, it is unfortunate that no one has examined the Agrippa-Maecenas debate from the perspective of political science.<sup>7</sup> This article undertakes such an investigation. More specifically, it probes Dio's political thought through the use of "operational code analysis" (OCA), a type of content analysis developed by political scientists to unearth and compare the worldviews of various modern leaders in a systematic way. The article commences with a brief history and description of OCA, which demonstrates the applicability and value of this method to the Agrippa-Maecenas debate. The article then presents an examination of Dio's operational code, from which we can glean broader aspects of Dio's political views. This analysis aims to expand our understanding of the Agrippa-Maecenas debate and Dio's political thought, with a view to complementing the rich literature on both the dialogue and Dio himself.

## II. A HISTORY OF OPERATIONAL CODE ANALYSIS

In two landmark works of political science investigating Bolshevik ideology, Nathan Leites (1951, 1953), a scholar at the RAND Corporation and the University of Chicago, coined the term "operational code" to signify the underlying worldviews of his subjects.<sup>8</sup> Leites examined various Marxist and Bolshevik writings to present a detailed characterization of the Bolsheviks' belief system, in hopes that such analysis would provide standards and guidelines for their future behavior.<sup>9</sup> In his own words, Leites attempted "to discover the rules which the Bolsheviks believe to be necessary for effective political conduct."<sup>10</sup> The U.S. government

<sup>7</sup>Zawadzki 1983, 318.

<sup>8</sup>Contra Walker 1990, 403, and Crichlow 1998, 688, there is no direct link between the work of Merton 1954 and OCA. Accordingly, Walker 2003 and Walker and Schafer 2010, in offering histories of this analysis, do not cite Merton as its progenitor. George 1969, 191, dislikes the term "operational code," but this remains the label attached to the method.

<sup>9</sup>Political scientists and political psychologists who have engaged in OCA generally remain cagey about its use to predict the future actions of statesmen and leadership groups. See, e.g., George 1969, 191; Walker 1990, 406, 412: "An individual's operational code may structure the 'menu for choice,' thereby defining the range of the decision-maker's choice propensities, but operational code theory is relatively silent about the cognitive and emotional processes that accompany the specific definitions of the situation, decision, and action." Yet many scholars have clearly aimed to employ OCA to determine the likely parameters of leaders' future conduct. For an up-to-date history of OCA and its use, see Walker and Schafer 2010.

<sup>10</sup>Leites 1951, xi.

judged Leites' work sufficiently valuable to serve as a guide for American negotiators in truce talks with the Communists in Korea.<sup>11</sup>

It was not until political scientist Alexander George systematized Leites' methods in a seminal 1969 article, however, that further academic work on operational code commenced.<sup>12</sup> George transformed Leites' approach to content analysis into the study of modern leaders' philosophical and instrumental beliefs about politics.<sup>13</sup> Stephen Walker, a prominent practitioner of OCA, characterized the distinction between these two sorts of beliefs thus: "Whereas philosophical (i.e., epistemological) beliefs refer to the assumptions and premises about the fundamental nature of politics, the nature of political conflict, and the role of the individual in history, instrumental beliefs focus upon ends-means relationships in the context of political action."<sup>14</sup>

George suggested that researchers could unearth these beliefs, and ultimately compare the worldviews of disparate leaders, by using a set of standardized questions to structure the analysis of leaders' speeches and writings:

### *Philosophical Questions*

- (P 1) What is the "essential" nature of political life? Is the political universe one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one's political opponents?
- (P 2) What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one's fundamental political values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic or must one be pessimistic on this score, and in what respects the one and/or the other?
- (P 3) Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent?
- (P 4) How much "control" or "mastery" can one have over historical development? What is one's role in "moving" and "shaping" history in the desired direction?
- (P 5) What is the role of "chance" in human affairs and in historical development?

<sup>11</sup> Bell 1955, 179.

<sup>12</sup> George 1969.

<sup>13</sup> George borrowed the distinction between "philosophical" (i.e., "epistemological") and "instrumental" beliefs from Brim et al. 1962.

<sup>14</sup> Walker 1990, 405.

*Instrumental Questions*

- (I 1) What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?
- (I 2) How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?
- (I 3) How are the risks of political action calculated, controlled, and accepted?
- (I 4) What is the best “timing” of action to advance one’s interests?
- (I 5) What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one’s interests?<sup>15</sup>

These questions served as the wellspring for numerous forays into qualitative OCA.<sup>16</sup> In subsequent methodological studies, George and Ole Holsti (another formative theorist of operational code) refined and augmented these sets of questions, in part to ensure that OCA remained compatible with new findings about belief systems from the realm of cognitive psychology.<sup>17</sup>

More recently, political scientists have attempted quantitative approaches to determining modern leaders’ operational codes. The most popular of these has proved to be the Verbs in Context System (VICS), which was pioneered at the start of the twenty-first century.<sup>18</sup> Through a statistical analysis of language used in speeches and writings, VICS provides quantitative evidence to support conclusions about a leader’s operational code. It measures philosophical and instrumental beliefs along indices corresponding to George’s questions, focusing especially on the choice and frequency of particular verbs that leaders use to describe potential courses of action. Thus, the extent to which leaders believe that they can influence historical development through their own actions, for example, can be quantified and compared. Political scientists and psychologists have continued to publish scholarship on OCA to the present day.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> George 1969, 201–16.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Holsti 1970; McLellan 1971; Walker 1977; Hermann 1980.

<sup>17</sup> See Holsti 1977; George 1979.

<sup>18</sup> For a fuller discussion of VICS, see Crichlow 1998, 683–90; Walker and Schafer 2010, 5499–503.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Crichlow 1998; Walker, Schafer, and Young 1998; Walker and Schafer 2000; Verbeek 2003; Feng 2005.

### III. THE APPLICABILITY OF OPERATIONAL CODE ANALYSIS TO THE AGRIPPA-MAECENAS DEBATE

There are numerous reasons to believe that OCA amounts to a fruitful direction for those investigating the Agrippa-Maecenas debate. This remains the case, despite the fact that classical scholars must confine themselves to qualitative analysis of the subject; our comparatively meager evidence—combined with the differences between ancient Greek and English—does not allow for quantitative approaches such as VICS. Quantitative studies, however, have validated the efficacy of qualitative assessments of operational codes, and thus we need not fear that we are employing an “outdated” methodology.<sup>20</sup>

Since political scientists investigating modern leaders’ operational codes have focused much of their attention on speeches, the method’s applicability to the Agrippa-Maecenas debate should be obvious. As is not the case with the modern addresses political scientists study, Dio attributed the sentiments in the dialogue to two historical personages, rather than take credit for them himself. Thus there may be some doubt as to whether our analysis will discover Dio’s personal operational code. Yet classicists investigating the Agrippa-Maecenas debate have long believed that the Maecenas oration at least largely presents Dio’s views.<sup>21</sup> Some recent scholarship, moreover, has suggested that Agrippa’s speech also

<sup>20</sup> See Walker 1990, 410. For a discussion of some weaknesses inherent to qualitative approaches to OCA, see Holsti 1977, 42–43.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Meyer 1891, 73–87, whose useful discussion in many ways amounts to the *locus classicus* of this argument; Schwartz 1899, 1719–20; Jardé 1925, 26–32, esp. 32; Hammond 1932, 89–90; Ensslin 1939, 59–60; Starr 1952, 13; Crook 1955, 126–28; Bleicken 1962, esp. 453; Gabba 1962, who attributes Maecenas’ recommendations for the Empire’s fiscal policy to Dio; Millar 1964, 107, who sees the second (instrumental) portion of the Maecenas address as “a political pamphlet”; Berrigan 1968, esp. 43; van Stekelenburg 1971, esp. 111; Forte 1972, 485–86; Manuwald 1979, 21; McKechnie 1981, esp. 150; Zawadzki 1983, 276, 296; Barnes 1984, 254; Aalders 1986, 282, n. 6; Reinhold 1988, 179, who believes that the Maecenas oration “is the authentic voice of Dio: it contains the essence of his pragmatic thinking about the Empire, the monarchy to which he was unreservedly committed, and the interests and role of his social class in the imperial governance”; Gowing 1992, 25–26; Swan 2004, 28; Kuhlmann 2010, esp. 117–18. Smyshlyayev 1991 largely agrees, though he stresses that not all the suggestions in the Maecenas speech necessarily correspond to Dio’s personal sentiments (143). Fechner 1986, 72–73, however, is not certain that Maecenas’ sentiments are Dio’s. Hammond 1932 suggested that the Maecenas speech offers a portrait of the Empire and its evolution as it existed in Dio’s day. Scholars have not found this convincing: see, e.g., Gabba 1955, 318; Bleicken 1962, 447–49; Barnes 1984, 254, n. 58.



contains sentiments ascribable to the historian.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, despite Dio's attribution of the remarks in the debate, we have strong reason to believe that this invented dialogue can tell us much about Dio's own political proclivities. The forthcoming analysis, moreover, will present sufficiently strong overlap between attitudes detectable in the debate and opinions Dio expresses elsewhere in the history to suggest that the dialogue contains many of the historian's own opinions—even though undoubtedly not every argument Agrippa and Maecenas pronounce in it corresponds to Dio's normative political views.<sup>23</sup>

In fact, OCA can help us solve, *inter alia*, one important aspect of the debate of interest to modern scholars. According to most, Dio's Agrippa address presents an intentionally weak case in favor of democracy, which serves as a counterpoise for Dio's "true" views in the Maecenas oration.<sup>24</sup> Others, however, contend that Dio intended readers to reflect on the dialogue as a whole, and that his beliefs are apparent in both orations, regardless of the debate's superficially agonistic character.<sup>25</sup> By separately assessing the operational codes of Dio's Agrippa and Maecenas, we can help settle this matter.

Features specific to the dialogue also make it an apt subject for OCA. Agrippa's oration presents a philosophical defense of democracy;

<sup>22</sup>E.g., Espinosa Ruiz 1982, esp. 35–36, 90–101, 470–73; Pelling 1983, 222; Zawadzki 1983, 316.

<sup>23</sup>This seems an especially important point in light of the incisive work of Kuhlmann 2010, which suggests the strong influence of the constitutional debate of Herodotus (3.80–82) on the Agrippa-Maecenas dialogue. Although many of Kuhlmann's points are well taken, he may overstate the Herodotean pedigree of Dio's debate. On this topic, see below. Kuhlmann, esp. 114–16, for instance, contends that Agrippa anachronistically argues in favor of Greek-style democracy because Herodotus has Otanes do the same (3.80). It is important to recognize that even Kuhlmann, who focuses much attention on the Herodotean pedigree of the debate, contends that it broadcasts many of Dio's own sentiments.

<sup>24</sup>E.g., Schwartz 1899, 1719–20; Ensslin 1939, 59, who believed that Agrippa's address would only appeal to "incurable romanticists"; Gabba 1955, 316; van Stekelenburg 1971, 110–11; Swan 2004, 28. Zawadzki 1983, 283, does not completely discount the importance of the Agrippa speech but still views it as a mere rhetorical declamation that fails to rise to the level of a political program. According to Berrigan 1968 and Fechner 1986, however, Agrippa's address is more philosophically compelling than Maecenas' corollary, but this conclusion has not proved popular. Cf. Reinhold 1988, 170: "Because of its general, largely theoretical nature, Agrippa's speech is usually dismissed as conventional rhetoric, following a pattern of the traditional *suasoria* of the schools, filled with rhetorical topoi."

<sup>25</sup>E.g., Espinosa Ruiz 1982, esp. 33–36, 90–101; Pelling 1983, 222; Zawadzki 1983, 316; Fechner 1986, 73–74, 78–83; Reinhold 1988, 170. Cf. Steidle 1988, 207. Although he still links Dio's personal views to the Maecenas speech, Manuwald 1979, 23, notes that the *Historia Romana* contains some sentiments sympathetic to those appearing in the Agrippa oration.

it seems an ideal text for the philosophical portion of George's queries. The longer Maecenas speech offers both a theoretical justification for monarchy (14–18) and a detailed series of concrete proposals for the administration of the Empire (19–40). This address can be usefully divided according to the philosophical and instrumental categories George established for operational code.<sup>26</sup>

Nor is this sort of analysis merely applicable to the Agrippa-Maecenas dialogue; it will also serve to expand our understanding of it. In some cases, political scientists have focused on queries similar to those Dio scholars have explored. Swan, for instance, offers helpful analysis of Dio's views on chance, and this roughly corresponds to George's question P 5.<sup>27</sup> In other cases, political scientists and political psychologists engaged in content analysis have proved interested in different sorts of queries from those typically examined by scholarship on the debate. OCA thus brings to light some new questions that will broaden our knowledge of Dio's political outlook.

The method possesses other advantages. Unlike traditional discursive approaches to classical texts, OCA facilitates an investigation that proceeds systematically. It will force us to determine whether Dio's Agrippa and Maecenas present similar or different answers to fundamental political questions. The systematic nature of OCA will also allow classicists to engage in potentially rich comparative investigations of their subjects' worldviews. By offering a shared conceptual framework and a useful set of typologies, it can help ancient historiographers place their conclusions in a broader comparative perspective. OCA may therefore prove useful not only for those investigating the work of Dio; comparative estimations of various classical authors' operational codes could also yield further insights.

Before I begin this study, we should recognize a few potential complications involved in applying George's version of OCA to the Agrippa-Maecenas debate. First, it is important to recognize that George's elaboration of operational code pertains chiefly to the realm of foreign

<sup>26</sup> It is unfortunate that the Agrippa oration lacks an instrumental section, for this would have allowed us to present a comparative analysis of both speeches' answers for all George's questions. As we shall see, however, we possess a good deal of evidence regarding Dio's instrumental beliefs. Moreover, our examination will encompass more than a comparison between the two orations. It will also analyze Dio's operational code more broadly, by discussing various relevant portions of the *Historia Romana*, and will allow for comparisons and contrasts between Dio and other ancient authors. An instrumental portion of Dio's Agrippa address would have been useful, but it is by no means essential for our purposes.

<sup>27</sup> Swan 2004, 8–13.

policy.<sup>28</sup> Dio's dialogue, however, mostly concerns domestic issues.<sup>29</sup> As we shall see anon, this necessitates minor changes to a few of George's original questions. We need not trouble ourselves overmuch with this matter, however, since Leites himself never confined OCA to foreign affairs,<sup>30</sup> and the later focus on the international realm undoubtedly relates to the history of this method's use during the Cold War.

Additionally, political scientists engaged in OCA have attempted to determine the belief systems of either political leaders or (less often) elite groups in power. Dio himself, though a member of the Roman Senate and a two-time consul, was never in a position of serious Imperial authority and power.<sup>31</sup> All the same, since Dio's Agrippa-Maecenas dialogue focuses on the correct course of action for a leader who possesses this sort of power, it should still allow us the opportunity to discern the historian's sentiments regarding grand strategic concerns amenable to OCA.

We should recognize, furthermore, that various issues that cause problems for political scientists employing these methods do not trouble us. Numerous political scientists have examined modern leaders' operational codes through an analysis of their public speeches. In the case of most of these leaders, their addresses were composed by speechwriters, rather than by the political actor. This renders such studies more problematic, especially if they encompass quantitative analysis of individual word choices.<sup>32</sup> In studying the Agrippa-Maecenas debate, however, we can be virtually certain that it was the product of Dio himself—even if not all its sentiments amount to Dio's normative political views.<sup>33</sup> Regarding

<sup>28</sup>Nor, we should add, is George alone in limiting OCA chiefly to discussions of foreign affairs. See, e.g., Holsti 1977, whose elaborations on George's original questions are so focused on foreign policy as to seem largely inapplicable to the Agrippa-Maecenas dialogue. One notes, moreover, a tendency on the part of political scientists engaging in OCA to home in on international affairs in their studies: e.g., Walker 1977; Crichlow 1998.

<sup>29</sup>Few sentiments offered in the dialogue center on foreign policy. Dio's Maecenas stresses that a ruler should be inclined toward peace, though his army should always be prepared for war (52.37.1). He expends little effort, however, elaborating on the rationale behind a non-expansionist foreign policy.

<sup>30</sup>Leites 1951, xiii: "there is reason to assume that these rules [i.e., the Bolshevik operational code] are pervasive in Bolshevik policy calculations, whether they refer to domestic or foreign policy, propaganda, or military policy."

<sup>31</sup>On Dio's life and career, see Millar 1964, 5–27; Zawadzki 1983, 277–78; Swan 2004, 1–3.

<sup>32</sup>See Crichlow 1998, 690, who attempts to minimize the complications that this entails.

<sup>33</sup>For good reason, no modern scholar has contended that the debate amounts to a recording of sentiments that the historical Agrippa and Maecenas uttered. Some have suggested, furthermore, that Dio's choice of Agrippa as the supporter of democracy is inapt:

the addresses of non-English-speaking actors, moreover, political scientists employing OCA tend to rely on translations;<sup>34</sup> we need not do so. Nor must we worry about another concern that impacts the study of contemporary political leaders: in examining Dio, we obviously have no concern for using the method as a means to divine his future conduct.<sup>35</sup> At the very least, OCA of the Agrippa-Maecenas debate will broaden our approach to this dialogue and suggest responses about core political beliefs that Dio harbored.

#### IV. THE OPERATIONAL CODES OF DIO'S AGRIPPA AND MAECENAS

In the following sections, you will find George's list of philosophical and instrumental questions for OCA, which are individually accompanied by responses. With regard to each of the philosophical queries, three separate analyses appear—one for Dio's Agrippa speech, another for Maecenas' reply, and a third for the remainder of Dio's history. These distinct responses will also permit comparative analysis. Through these means, we aim to clarify the epistemological foundations of Dio's operational code. For the instrumental questions, analyses follow only for the Maecenas oration and Dio's history as a whole, since the Agrippa speech, lacking a pragmatic program of reform, does not address this portion of George's queries. Although neither oration has survived from antiquity in its entirety, we appear to possess the large majority of them;<sup>36</sup> undoubtedly, sufficient portions of the orations remain for them to serve as the material for an examination of Dio's operational code.

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e.g., Gabba 1955, 317; Millar 1964, 105; Reinhold 1988, 167. Cf. van Stekelenburg 1971, 108; McKechnie 1981, 154; Zawadzki 1983, 281; Fechner 1986, 74. If it is true that Dio's Maecenas address in part aims to limit the power and influence of the equestrians in the Empire (as Espinosa Ruiz 1982, esp. 478, argues), one could argue that the equestrian Maecenas seems like a similarly unlikely conduit for such sentiments.

<sup>34</sup> Leites 1951, the book that inaugurated OCA, itself relies on translations of Lenin's and Stalin's speeches and writings.

<sup>35</sup> See above, n. 9. We also do not need to worry about cognitive consistency theory and other concerns from the realm of cognitive, social, and motivational psychology, which matter to those aiming to determine the ways in which leaders' political views may alter over time. On the importance of this issue, see George 1979; Walker 2003, 55–58; Walker and Schafer 2010, 5493, 5497–98.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., Fechner 1986, 76, who argues that the Agrippa address is almost entirely preserved. Cf. Reinhold 1988, 168: "A one-folio lacuna in the manuscript curtails the end of Agrippa's speech (2–13) and the start of Maecenas' (14–40)." On the manuscript tradition of Dio's Book 52, see Zawadzki 1983, 273–74.

## V. THE PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

(P 1) *What is the “essential” nature of political life? Is the political universe one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one’s political opponents?*

*The Agrippa Speech.* The implicit responses of Dio’s Agrippa to these questions revolve around domestic political opponents; the speech does not mention foreign affairs. Its “enemies,” then, are all disgruntled citizens and other internal threats to the political order. We can still categorize the oration’s commentary on the nature of political life as pessimistic. Agrippa casts the political universe as so hostile and a man’s enemies so numerous that democracy becomes the only possible way to endure the evils of human nature. In the course of the speech, Dio depicts Roman citizens as incorrigibly suspicious of those in power; thus his Agrippa argues that if Octavian decides to establish a monarchy, his subjects will believe that he aimed to enslave them (2.4). Furthermore, the oration stresses that monarchs inevitably spawn conspirators and other enemies (4.4, 5.4). For the man in control of the state, it remains impossible to guard against opponents justly, since they are inevitably so numerous (8.1).

The speech also attempts to support the conclusion that democracies are far more harmonious than tyrannies. This leaves the reader with the possibility that the nature of political life depends to a great extent upon regime type. Agrippa stresses, for instance, that those who inhabit a democracy wish only success for their equals (4.6). Monarchical subjects, on the other hand, condemn their fellow citizens and hope that they suffer hardships (5.2). He asserts, moreover, that strife, though key to monarchies, is incidental to democracies (13.6).

But Agrippa’s rosy assessment of democracy cannot obscure the gloomy take on political life that the oration promotes. He hopes to present the impression that democracies cultivate a different political culture, but his Thucydidean appraisals of human nature undercut this conclusion.<sup>37</sup> Regardless of the type of government that presides over a

<sup>37</sup>This calls to mind the tension between Dio’s Thucydidean take on human nature and the historian’s attempt to offer moral instruction to his readership. On this topic, see Reinhold 1988, 215; Rich 1989, 91; Adler 2011a, 146–47. If anything, Dio appears even more pessimistic about human nature than was Thucydides, as the scholarly debate over Thucydides’ views on this matter demonstrates. For recent criticisms of the conclusion that Thucydides remains utterly cynical on this score, see, for example, Johnson Bagby 1994, esp. 143–47; Ober 1998, 67–72; Kokaz 2001, esp. 38; Lebow 2003, 145–46. See also Crane 1998, 296–303.

state, Agrippa maintains that punishment of wrongdoers is a fundamental necessity, since most transgressors are incapable of improving their behavior through any other means (7.1). Even democracies experience their share of political instability; among their strengths, according to Agrippa, is their severe punishment of would-be tyrants (9.1). Although there remain differences based on regime types, Agrippa portrays political life as conflict-ridden and rife with political opponents. He supports democracy because it purportedly eschews many of the flaws that plague tyrannies, given the assumption that the political universe remains fundamentally conflictual.

*The Maecenas Speech.* As is the case with the Agrippa oration, Dio's Maecenas speech touches on answers to these queries only insofar as they pertain to the realm of domestic politics. Although he favors a different future for the Roman state, his Maecenas offers a similar assessment of political life and human nature. In many ways, the Maecenas address presents conclusions based on the same premises one detects in the Agrippan corollary. Maecenas, for instance, proffers an equally pessimistic take on the political universe. In Maecenas' case, this pessimism depends partly on governmental types.

Much as one would expect from an oration criticizing Agrippa's advice to Octavian, the Maecenas address appears especially cynical about the political life of a democratic state. Since it fails to promote a hierarchical society in which the "best" receive their just desserts, democracy, Maecenas asserts, leads to common ruin (κοινὸν . . . ὄλεθρον, 14.5).<sup>38</sup> Similarly, he focuses on the viciousness of one's political opponents in a democratic order: such men will ultimately undo a man's legislative accomplishments (17.4). Maecenas even mentions Rome's republican past as an example of the civil strife that engulfs democracies—especially powerful ones (15.6). In general, the oration's gloominess pertains to its withering indictment of democracy. Ordering the state as a monarchy, Maecenas argues, can at least ensure Octavian's safety (18.6).<sup>39</sup>

Yet the speech's cynical assessment of political life is not merely related to the form of government it opposes. One notes great pessimism in the Maecenas oration, and this colors its overall portrait of the political universe. Maecenas, for instance, in part argues for monarchy by offering a captious appraisal of most citizens; Octavian, he avers, recognizing the

<sup>38</sup> Cf. fr. 19, where Dio contends that the masses demonstrate no loyalty.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. 17.2, where Maecenas suggests that it would be unsafe for Octavian to give up his power.

incompetence of the populace, should put a stop to its insolence (14.3). Maecenas also assumes that one's political opponents are so vicious that it would be dangerous for Octavian to abdicate his power (17.2). To Maecenas, the political universe is so conflict-ridden that Octavian's response must be the establishment of a monarchy. He further stresses that troubles ultimately confound large and powerful states—regardless of the type of government they possess (16.2).

Dio's Maecenas appears to proffer a similarly bleak assessment of political life—one rooted in his view of human nature. To him, only a properly regimented society guards against otherwise inevitable conflicts. Although Maecenas maintains that Octavian can ameliorate the conflict-ridden nature of political life, he also stresses that he will only do so if he follows Maecenas' advice (18.6). Not just any monarchy will do; Octavian must establish his government according to Maecenas' rules or problems are bound to brew. As we have already mentioned, Maecenas believes that problems would fester for Rome regardless, insofar as it was a mighty and prosperous state.

*Dio's History.* Similar sentiments about the nature of the political universe abound in Dio's history. The historian presents, for instance, numerous examples of pessimism in regard to human nature. Mankind, Dio avers, is such that people fail to recognize their happiness until misfortune removes it (56.45.1). According to Dio's Livia, malefactors greatly outnumber those who hope to do good (55.14.5); in part for this reason, she contends, if Augustus were to punish his subjects properly, he would be compelled to kill most of mankind (55.20.4).<sup>40</sup> Although men always remember their anger towards those who have injured them, Dio informs us, they forget those from whom they have received benefits (46.34.2). Dio likewise contends that people abide by compacts only insofar as it remains advantageous to do so (fr. 46.2). In short, Dio maintains—in both the Agrippa and Maecenas addresses as well as in his history as a whole—that human beings are selfish and inclined to transgressions.<sup>41</sup> Even in regard to the much-lauded emperor Titus, Dio suggests that he may have been a good ruler only because his short reign did not offer him opportunities for wrongdoing (66[66].18.3–5).

Dio's history also presents evidence of its author's views on the

<sup>40</sup> On Dio's view of Livia, see Adler 2011a. Cf. fr. 36.1–3, which argues that draconian penalties fail to instill prudence in mankind, since threats cannot alter human nature.

<sup>41</sup> On this score, see also fr. 6.3; fr. 17.7; fr. 32.18; 36.40.5; 37.55.2; 38.12.5; 38.18.2–3; 45.37.5; 50.30.2–3; 53.24.1.



conflictual nature of political life. Given his pessimism about human motivations, it is not surprising that the historian maintains such an outlook. According to Dio, for example, Ancus Marcius discovered that a state cannot remain safe simply by striving for peace; rather, a conciliatory policy on its own courts doom, since a lack of aggression leads to ruin (fr. 8.1). It is natural, Dio suggests, for most human beings to fight against an opponent even when it does not remain in their interest to do so (fr. 20.4). More broadly, as far as Dio's Augustus is concerned, all benefits are mixed with unpleasantness, and the greatest evils accompany the best blessings (56.8.2).

One notes in the history echoes of specific points Dio has Agrippa and Maecenas voice in the debate. Both Agrippa (4.4, 5.4) and Augustus (55.15.1), for example, suggest that monarchs are especially susceptible to envy and treachery. Dio elsewhere relates that people always distrust tyrants (fr. 40.15). Even during the Roman Republic, Dio maintains, prominent statesmen incurred the jealousy of their fellow citizens. Julius Caesar, for instance, favored bestowing Pompey with the command against Mithridates because, Dio tells us, additional honors were bound to render Pompey envied and odious (36.43.4). Dio relates that Pompey for the same reason opposed the selection of him to a command against Mediterranean pirates (36.26.1–2). This matches the conflict-ridden description of democratic politics promoted by Maecenas (cf. 15.6, 17.4). Just as Dio's Agrippa contends that Octavian's subjects will believe he always hoped to enslave them (2.4), moreover, Dio maintains that Caesar's feigned distress over Pompey's death incited ridicule, since Caesar aimed to establish a monarchy (42.8). Overall, it appears as if the conflictual nature of political life described in both the Agrippa and Maecenas orations matches Dio's general outlook.

The combined pessimism of the two speeches on this score may serve to intensify the gloominess for the reader. Both speakers promote the idea that the world is harsh, but their advice can largely remove the strife inherent to political life. Yet the two advisors also present arguments that speak against the effectiveness of their rival's counsel. Agrippa maintains that human nature is too flawed to make for a happy monarchy; Maecenas asserts that human nature is too pernicious to ensure a stable democracy. Given the author's pessimism about political life, readers may conclude that *both* speakers are correct. Perhaps Rome, as a mighty Empire, is bound to fail.



(P 2) *What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one's fundamental political values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic or must one be pessimistic on this score, and in what respects the one and/or the other?*

*The Agrippa Speech.* Toward the start of the speech, Dio's Agrippa makes clear that his commentary aims for what is best for Octavian personally, as well as what is best for the state as a whole (2.2). Accordingly, though the oration does not directly answer all the questions posed in P 2, it suggests that Agrippa has fundamental political values and aspirations in mind. Throughout the speech, he appears to take for granted that both democracies and monarchies work toward the same goals. The difference, according to the Agrippa address, is that democracies stand a far better chance of realizing these aspirations. The oration offers numerous purported reasons why a monarch cannot rule a state well; its focus on this issue suggests that good governance is the ultimate—if rather nebulous—political aspiration.

According to Agrippa, monarchies' failures in this regard are legion. It remains difficult, for example, for a king to establish a fair judiciary, since judges will want to acquit the accused as a means to demonstrate their power (7.2).<sup>42</sup> Agrippa also avers that it is dangerous for a monarch to entrust the administration of state affairs to good men, because they will inevitably aim to overthrow the authoritarian government (8.4–5). In another demonstration of this same contention, the oration suggests that the human race will not countenance a monarch (4.3–4). Agrippa further believes that Rome's historical circumstances render the transition to a kingship even more fraught. He asserts that it is troublesome to establish a monarchy in a state whose populace has lived so long in freedom (5.4, 13.3).

All this may lead one to believe that the Agrippa address aims to demonstrate the impossibility of realizing fundamental political aspirations under a monarchical regime. After all, the speech stresses the greater facility with which democracies operate. Agrippa asserts, for instance, that democracies encourage good behavior in their citizens (4.7); this suggests that it would not be difficult for Octavian to realize his aspirations, since democracy already promoted a body politic inclined toward beneficent ends. Further, when instructing Octavian to implement reforms before

<sup>42</sup> Cf. 40.55.3, where Dio contends that Republican jurors convicted Titus Munatius Plancus Bursa because they did not want to appear as if they were Pompey's slaves.

abdicated his power, he argues that the most important of these laws will stand the test of time (13.5). Democracies, in addition, can punish citizens who vie for tyranny (9.1). Overall, Agrippa stresses the comparative ease with which a democracy can function salubriously.

As was the case with Dio's responses to P 1, however, there are hints of cynicism in the speech. Although his Agrippa remains more sanguine about the prospect of good governance in a democratic regime, he is not a dyed-in-the-wool optimist. In fact, the oration stresses that it is difficult to set up a salutary state of affairs in a democracy too—even though it remains vastly more troublesome to do so as a monarch (5.3).<sup>43</sup> Despite his recommendations in favor of democracy, Agrippa does not see harmonious political life entirely as an outgrowth of the proper form of governance. The realization of political goals is far from automatic. For this reason, the speech recognizes that Octavian himself, if he reestablishes the Republic, cannot ensure the resilience of his own political program (13.5). To Agrippa, a monarch should harbor no illusions about actualizing proper political aspirations, since these aspirations are unattainable for a kingship. In a democracy, however, there are grounds for cautious optimism: democracy's nature renders likely—though by no means certain—the prospects for success. Even in an address touting the great advantages of democracy, Dio cannot help but express some skepticism about its preferred form of governance.

*The Maecenas Speech.* Dio's Maecenas speech essentially offers the same responses to P 2, though it touts monarchy as the more likely vehicle to realize proper political aspirations. It is unfortunate that the start of this oration has not survived, because our beginning makes clear that Maecenas had been addressing the prospects for success under disparate constitutions (14.1). Even so, the speech contains numerous sentiments aimed at demonstrating the futility of any attempt to realize political goals and values in a democratic state. To Maecenas, all democracies are doomed to failure. As we noted previously, according to the speech, mob rule leads to ruin for all (14.5). Such governments are congenitally rife with civil and foreign wars (15.5). Given their lack of leadership, democracies are rudderless (16.3), and thus the establishment of a democratic form of

<sup>43</sup> Τοιούτων δὲ δὴ τούτων ὄντων οὐχ ὁρῶ τί ποτ' ἂν ἐϊκότως ἐπαρείεσθαι μοι ναρχῆσαι ἐπιθυμῆσαι. πρὸς γὰρ τῷ τοῖς δήμοις χαλεπὸν εἶναι τὸ πολίτευμα, πολὺ δυσχερέστερον αὐτῷ σοι γένοιντο ἄν ("Since these things are so, I cannot see what could ever persuade you to lust after sole rule. For that form of government, in addition to being hard for democracies, would be far more difficult still for you yourself").

government would destroy Octavian's prospects for attaining his political aspirations. In a direct refutation of sentiments Agrippa expressed (13.5), Maecenas makes clear that in a democracy Octavian's—or any other man's—accomplishments will be quickly undone (17.4).

Although his harping on democracies' deficiencies should be crystal clear, Maecenas also puts forth reasons why a Roman democracy would be an even more certain failure. He asserts that it is especially difficult to administer a large and powerful democracy, given the size of the population (15.6). This contention does not fit well with another proposed in the selfsame speech—that there is little toil involved in maintaining any (presumably monarchical) state, as opposed to expanding it (18.5).<sup>44</sup> Still, it manages to underscore the purported inability of democratic leaders to accomplish their political goals.

The address maintains that it remains easier for monarchs to succeed on this score. To Maecenas, one ought to attribute this to the way in which a monarchy properly orders society. By allowing for a supposedly meritocratic administration, a kingship promotes human happiness; for the same reason, a monarchy can avoid hazardous foreign wars and civil strife (15.4).<sup>45</sup> Provided they promote a hierarchical society in which the “best” receive their proper desserts, monarchies should lead to great blessings for their populations.

This sentiment, however, hints at the fact that Maecenas does not believe that the realization of political aspirations is an automatic outgrowth of a particular regime type. Some ideas in the speech actually stress the difficulties inherent in monarchs' political successes. Maecenas recognizes, for example, the inherent (though supposedly worthwhile) risks involved in establishing a kingship (18.1). Even a king can fail to fulfill a state's proper political goals. Monarchies that do not promote a properly ordered society are similarly doomed to failure. The address' optimism does not pertain to all monarchies—only a monarchy rightly guided according to Maecenas' political program (18.7).

The two counterpoised orations could together reinforce a sense of pessimism on Dio's part. In this instance, they may serve to underscore the notion that it remains exceptionally difficult to attain one's political

<sup>44</sup> Καὶ μὴ μοι τὸ μέγεθος τῆς ἀρχῆς φοβηθῆς. ὅσω τε γὰρ πλείων ὑπάρχει, τόσω πλείω καὶ τὰ σώζοντα ἔχει, καὶ μακρῶ τὸ φυλάξαι τι τοῦ κτήσασθαι ῥαῖόν ἐστι (“And you should not fear the great size of the Empire. For the more it encompasses, the more saving graces it has, and it is much easier to guard something than to acquire it”).

<sup>45</sup> This suggests that, for Dio's Maecenas, military expansion and colonialism are not among a state's proper political aspirations. For more on this topic, see below.

aspirations, regardless of a state's constitution. Each speaker does not hope to make this appear true for his preferred system of governance, but the way in which both addresses gainsay the efficacy of their opponent's arguments may leave the reader with this impression. This is perhaps a surprising conclusion concerning a debate that appears at least partly aimed at influencing political life in Dio's own day.

*Dio's History.* As was the case with his Agrippa and Maecenas addresses, Dio elsewhere in his work suggests that there are ways to maximize a leader's chances to reach his political goals, though there are also reasons to retain a sense of pessimism about his prospects. In one fragment from the history, for example, Dio asserts that precaution and calculation can usually assure success (fr. 32.13). Moderation, Dio elsewhere contends, remains a crucial quality for fruitful endeavors (fr. 32.14; fr. 52).

Yet Dio appears to believe that most people do not incline toward caution and moderation and thus do not have the opportunity to enjoy long-term victories; in fact, Dio maintains that success itself is to blame for men's failures, since it encourages in them an overconfident casualness that leads to ruin (fr. 26.3; fr. 36.25).<sup>46</sup> In advice he imparts to the exiled Cicero, moreover, Dio's philosopher Philiscus argues that man's victories are ephemeral (38.27.1).<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere, Dio contends that the justness of a particular cause does not ensure its political success (fr. 5.4).<sup>48</sup> Even very formidable people, Dio avers, cannot be certain of their power (79[78].41.1). On the whole, the perspective on political success Dio reveals in the Agrippa-Maecenas debate seems analogous to that offered in the history itself. In both cases, one notes a large dollop of pessimism.<sup>49</sup>

(P 3) *Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent?*

*The Agrippa Speech.* To some degree, the Agrippa-Maecenas debate amounts to a less effective text to consider Dio's views on these questions. Both his interlocutors naturally aim to argue that they can predict the future, since they hope to offer Octavian a rationale to establish a certain sort of government. The arguments in favor of a particular course

<sup>46</sup> Millar 1964, 76, dismisses this view as a mere "commonplace."

<sup>47</sup> On Dio's dialogue between Philiscus and Cicero, see Gowing 1998.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. 110.1, where Dio claims that those doing wrong cannot succeed.

<sup>49</sup> Yet, as we shall see below, Dio's appeal for moderation and caution in the face of initial victories may accord with an overall message of the dialogue as a whole.

of action understandably revolve—at least in part—around the idea that the advisor can foresee the advantages and disadvantages to come. It would naturally seem ineffective to tout a program for the future while disavowing all knowledge of its impact. Thus the dialogue's nature tilts Dio's views in a particular direction.

Yet both speeches present evidence to suggest firm responses to these queries. The Agrippa address, for example, demonstrates that monarchies predictably promote disastrous results. By focusing on the ways in which kingship is purportedly incompatible with human nature, the oration signals the inevitable troubles ahead for the aspiring monarch. People ultimately cannot countenance kingship (4.3); its instability is both predictable and inevitable. Similarly, whereas democratic citizens gladly make contributions to their state's needs (6.2), in monarchies they do not (6.3). If a ruler bestows honors capriciously, his failure is preordained (12.6). This suggests that Agrippa's view of human nature necessitates specific political outcomes.

The notion that the future is largely predictable seems to accord with Dio's Thucydidean take on people's motivations. Since he appears to believe that human nature is fixed, it follows that one should be able to divine political outcomes *avant la lettre*.<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, though, the Agrippa speech seems less assured in forecasting later successes. To be certain, the address highlights some inevitabilities for a democratic state: that its strife will be incidental (13.6), for example. But Agrippa appears less sure of democratic achievements than he is of monarchical failures. This serves to underscore Dio's inherent pessimism.

*The Maecenas Speech.* The response of Dio's Maecenas presents less evidence pertaining to the predictability of the political future. It remains difficult, therefore, to compare and contrast this aspect of the two orations. Yet the Maecenas address offers one statement that reinforces the impression noted above. When one decides on the proper government to establish, Maecenas contends, it is important to weigh the results that come from them (14.3). This suggests, on Maecenas' part, that one can foresee consequences in advance. This matches the Agrippa address' use of history to demonstrate future outcomes. As long as the Greeks lived under monarchies, Agrippa maintains, they accomplished nothing noteworthy; when they inhabited democracies, they proved extremely

<sup>50</sup> On Thucydides' perception of human nature as fixed, see, for instance, Crane 1998, 296–303; Gustafson 2000, 4; Johnson Bagby 2000, 21. For an opposing view, see Kokaz 2001, esp. 38: “There is nothing constant about Thucydides' conception of human nature.”

successful (9.2–3). Although Dio himself may have disagreed with the content of this argument,<sup>51</sup> this does not imply that he would have gain-said its premise—that the human past can predict the future. In fact, both speeches take for granted that the experiences of Greeks, Romans, and even barbarians will demonstrate what the future holds. They thus reveal a shared faith in the predictability of the future and the utility of historical analogy for determining cause and effect.

*Dio's History.* In his history as a whole, Dio seems less optimistic about the prospects for divining the future. According to Dio, the outcome of battles is particularly inscrutable.<sup>52</sup> Thus, for instance, Dio avers that Aulus Bucius Lappius Maximus did not deserve praise for his defeat of Lucius Antonius Saturninus' revolt against Domitian, because many commanders have won unexpected military victories (67[67].11.1). Dio stresses, furthermore, that even Elagabalus' tutor Gannys, a military novice, fared well in battle (79[78].38.3; 80[79].6.1). Dio also hints that portents are not always easily interpreted; the exact same omen can foreshadow drastically different outcomes when directed toward different people. The portents visited upon Trajan and Manius Acilius Glabrio during their consulship of 91 C.E., for example, foretold the emperorship for the former and death for the latter (67[67].12.1).<sup>53</sup>

To be sure, in Dio's history one also detects inklings of a more moral conception of the universe, which assures future success for the dutiful and honorable. As we noted above, Dio maintains that calculation and precaution often determine victory, whereas a lack of foresight necessitates ruin (fr. 32.13). But Dio's views on human nature most often lend a gloomy cast to the future. This does not merely pertain to the military realm but also holds true for political events. Thus Dio perceives that the Roman populace's transfer of support from Otho to Vitellius makes sense: people praise others as their fortunes shift, not according to their deservedness (64[65].1–2). Similarly, the historian asserts that injustice often prevails in the world (fr. 36.21).

Dio appears more certain of future outcomes in the Agrippa-Maecenas debate than in other places in his history. As we previously discussed, this likely relates to the specific character of the dialogue, one

<sup>51</sup> As is the case with other contentions in the Agrippa speech. The notion that civil strife is incidental to democracies (13.6), given the vicissitudes of both Greek and Roman history, seems like an especially farfetched argument.

<sup>52</sup> On this topic, see Swan 2004, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Dio discusses Glabrio's death in 95 C.E. at 67(67).14.3.

that argues in favor of particular regime types partly through estimations of their future effects. Yet we have ample evidence, from both the debate itself and the history proper, to conclude that Dio remained largely pessimistic about the time to come.

(P 4) *How much “control” or “mastery” can one have over historical development? What is one’s role in “moving” or “shaping” history in the desired direction?*

*The Agrippa Speech.* In order to make monarchy appear a less attractive option to Octavian, Dio’s Agrippa expends much energy stressing the degree to which a king lacks agency over affairs in his state. Throughout the oration, he underscores a monarch’s inability to shape the future. The address mentions, for instance, the difficulties besetting kings who attempt to raise revenues, since their subjects resist paying taxes (6.3).<sup>54</sup> Agrippa also highlights a ruler’s incapacity to run the state on his own (8.3–4, 10.1); to make matters worse, a king cannot safely choose competent subordinates to aid him (8.4–8). Nor can a monarch convince the populace that he is a fair-minded judge (7.4). In regard to matters over which a ruler maintains control, Agrippa attempts to minimize their importance. Thus he argues that a tyrant may save lives, enrich people, and harm enemies, but these do not outweigh more pressing problems (11.1). A king, further, cannot satisfy all those who ask for favors (12.1).

In only one instance does Agrippa offer the impression that a ruler plays a key role in shaping his monarchy. According to him, citizens in a kingdom naturally take on the character of their tyrant (5.2). This superficially suggests an extraordinary role in controlling historical development on the part of a king: he even molds his subjects’ dispositions. In reality, however, this does not amount to significant agency for the monarch; Agrippa assumes that this unavoidably leads to disaster: tyrants are ineluctably horrid, and thus their citizens will be similarly malign. This molding of character occurs naturally, and not as the result of a ruler’s will.

Whereas Agrippa focuses attention on a monarch’s incapacity to shape historical events, he also tries to convince the reader that a law-giver in a democratic state will not prove similarly feckless. He informs

<sup>54</sup>In addition to both the Agrippa and Maecenas orations, Dio also focuses attention on Roman taxation in his Boudica speech (62[62].3.2–5), and this suggests the possibility that fiscal matters particularly concerned him. On this topic, see Adler 2008, 190–91. For a discussion of Dio’s fiscal policies in the Maecenas address, see Gabba, 1962.

Octavian that in settling affairs for the Republic, his most important laws will stand the test of time (13.5). This does not amount to the strongest argument: Agrippa cannot contend that Octavian's program for reform would survive wholesale in a democracy. He spends little time on this matter, in comparison with his repeated attempts to demonstrate a monarch's futility. Still, Agrippa avers that a king has no mastery over historical development, whereas a prominent politician in a democratic state possesses at least some ability to shape affairs.

*The Maecenas Speech.* Dio's Maecenas both emphasizes a democratic citizen's incapacity to control historical development and highlights a king's powers in this regard. To be sure, he suggests that his interlocutor's points on this topic are not entirely incorrect: a tyrant cannot shape history in the direction he desires (cf. 15.1). According to Maecenas, however, Agrippa remains wrong in attributing this view to all monarchies. In numerous places, the Maecenas address implies that a king—when properly guided—possesses a grand ability to control historical development. At the speech's beginning, for example, he implores Octavian to reorganize Rome and steer it in a more moderate direction (14.1). This suggests great power on Octavian's part to shape the state as he sees fit. Moreover, the oration contends that a monarch, together with his advisors, can ensure that a state enjoys various blessings, avoids foreign entanglements, and eschews civil strife (15.4). Even in the realm of foreign affairs, Maecenas argues that a monarch remains in a position of mastery.

The speech contrasts this perception of kingship with pessimistic commentary on the role of democratic citizens in shaping historical development. This includes a direct refutation of a point Dio's Agrippa mustered (13.5): much of Sulla's legislation, Maecenas argues, was undone during his lifetime (17.4).<sup>55</sup> To Maecenas, even a dictator in a democracy cannot maintain mastery over the future, and cannot direct the state in the direction he hopes.<sup>56</sup> For this reason, the address concludes that a large democracy such as the Roman Republic is incapable of accomplishing anything (15.6).

The responses of the speeches to the questions posed in P 4 suggest that matters of agency played an important role in the way Dio argued

<sup>55</sup>The oration offers this contention very pointedly: as Reinhold (1988, 187) notes, the Maecenas speech is our only source that claims that Sulla committed suicide.

<sup>56</sup>It seems not to occur to Dio's Maecenas that the same fecklessness he attributes to Sulla could be the fate of a monarch too. When a king dies, his successor could undo his acts and reforms, directing the state in a different direction.



his points in the debate. The two orations support their preferred system of governance by highlighting the control their leaders possess over the state's character and future. At the same time, they both deny agency to leaders in their rival's choice of government in order to undermine his arguments. Dio's answers to P 4, therefore, are ultimately regime dependent: political leaders can shape history only in the speaker's favored forms of government. This conclusion subtly hints at the difficulties Dio perceives in leaders' attempts to gain mastery over historical events. Although Agrippa proves more sanguine about democratic politicians' abilities in this regard, we have seen that he hardly emphasizes the matter. Maecenas, furthermore, believes that only a rightly guided monarch can shape affairs in the matter of his choosing. To some extent, this impression results from the dialogue's agonistic character: the speakers aim to demonstrate the benefits of their favored form of government. Maecenas, importantly, believes that a well-advised Roman emperor can mold the future as it suits him. According to him, it is perhaps not the ruler who possesses agency in a monarchy so much as the clever advisor.

*Dio's History.* Various passages in Dio's history reinforce the debate's subtle sense of pessimism regarding a leader's shaping of events. The work stresses the ephemerality of human achievement. Philiscus informs Cicero, for example, that successes usher in failures, especially in times of factional strife (38.27.1). Undue victories, Dio tells us, lead to misfortune, since they eclipse one's concern for temperance (fr. 39.3). According to Dio, even as talented a commander as Hannibal could not change fortune's influence on battles (fr. 32.18). Although Dio offers the impression that moderation is key to sustained success, his history suggests that a leader lacks the ability to shape affairs (cf. 38.21.1).

In regard to one point, Dio presents sentiments that match those attributed to Agrippa in the debate. The historian, like his Agrippa (5.2), claims that a tyrant can influence his subjects' behavior for the worse. Thus Dio maintains that Nero's licentious activities in Rome prompted citizens to engage in similar acts of disorder and depravity (61[61].8.1–2). He likewise informs us that Otho's excessive gifts and attention encouraged lawlessness among his soldiery (63[64].9.2–3). Dio also asserts that Vitellius' troops lacked restraint because their leader suffered from the same flaw (64[65].4.4). Both in the Agrippa-Maecenas debate and in his narrative as a whole, Dio appears most convinced of a leader's negative impact on historical development. As was the case with our answers to P 1–P 3, a sense of pessimism dominates.

(P 5) *What is the role of “chance” in human affairs and in historical development?*

*The Agrippa Speech.* The Agrippa-Maecenas debate focuses little attention on matters of chance. As a result, neither address offers much guidance on Dio’s potential answers to this query. Perhaps the debate’s character—given the speakers’ goal of exhorting Octavian to follow a specific plan of action—does not leave much room for matters of fortune and indeterminacy. Our answers stemming from the dialogue, accordingly, are limited.

Dio’s Agrippa presents only a few remarks that pertain to the significance of chance in human affairs. Toward the beginning of his speech, he chastises human beings for attributing their successes to their own powers, while blaming their failures on divine will (2.6). From this sentiment—which seems linked to Dio’s pessimism about human nature—it is difficult to divine the oration’s view of chance’s import. Another sentiment in the address seems similarly unhelpful for our concerns: men ought not, Agrippa maintains, abuse the gifts of fortune, and thereupon wrong others (3.1). This suggests that the speech sees a role for chance in historical development, but Agrippa’s failure to elaborate on this score does not leave us with much in the way of evidence.

*The Maecenas Speech.* Dio’s response from Maecenas is a bit more helpful. The oration suggests that Octavian owes his current power over Rome to fortune and implores him to obey her—obviously by remaining in control of the state as its monarch (18.3). Maecenas also claims that the Romans ought to rejoice because fortune has freed them from civil strife and granted Octavian the role of organizing the state (18.4). Elsewhere in the address, Maecenas avers that Octavian’s current power demonstrates the gods’ pity for Rome (16.4).

These comments together suggest an important role on the part of chance in human affairs. The speech maintains, for instance, that Octavian does not owe his success entirely to his own powers; fortune obviously plays some part in historical development. Yet Maecenas does not elaborate on this matter, and thus it seems difficult to intuit his views with any more precision. It remains possible that appeals to fortune here are essentially pro forma. After all, throughout much of the philosophical portion of the debate, the two speakers assert that following particular courses of action will ensure the fruition of predetermined results. Such arguments do not leave much room for chance.

*Dio's History.* We must turn elsewhere to settle this matter more concretely. Thankfully, the remainder of the history offers many examples of Dio's views on the role of chance. This should perhaps come as no surprise, given Dio's stated devotion to his patron goddess Τύχη ("Fortune," 73[72].23.3–4).<sup>57</sup> Yet Dio's various pronouncements on chance often seem to lack consistency. At times Dio appears to suggest that human beings inhabit a moral universe; for this reason, Fortune favors the good. Thus, for example, Dio suggests that Romulus and Numa had divine guidance (fr. 6.5).<sup>58</sup> Dio also criticizes Tiberius Gracchus for supposing that one properly evaluates deeds according chance, rather than according to their intrinsic worth (fr. 83.2).

In other places, however, Dio presents a more capricious and amoral view of fortune. His discussion of the Second Samnite War, for example, highlights the ways in which Τύχη subjected both the Samnites and the Romans to the same humiliations, thereby displaying her omnipotence (fr. 36.22).<sup>59</sup> Dio's Cicero, in a speech offered in the aftermath of Caesar's assassination, suggests that both the just and unjust must tolerate the vicissitudes of chance and that the righteous are not guaranteed good results (44.27.2). According to Dio, moreover, power does not insulate people from fortune's whims (37.10.3).<sup>60</sup> Although it appears as if Dio grants agency in his history to both human beings and Fortune,<sup>61</sup> he remains unclear about the precise nature of divine will's role in terrestrial affairs.<sup>62</sup>

## VI. THE INSTRUMENTAL QUESTIONS

(I 1) *What is the best approach for selecting political goals or objectives?*<sup>63</sup>

*The Maecenas Speech.* Although Dio's Maecenas does not dilate on the proper way to select political goals, we can glean some of his thoughts on

<sup>57</sup> See also 38.28.1–2.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. 38.39.3, where Caesar tells his officers that Fortune supports Rome. At 56.24.2, Dio informs us that Augustus attributed the disaster of Varus (9 C.E.) to divine wrath.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. fr. 32.18; fr. 40.37–38.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. 79(78).24.2.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, 63(64).1.2, where Dio grants both Fortune and Galba free will.

<sup>62</sup> This suggests that Swan's 2004, 11, estimation of Dio's political universe is too rosy. For more on this topic, see below.

<sup>63</sup> I have slightly altered the original question posed by George 1969, 205: "What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?" As is common with George's instrumental queries, his question seems aimed at the foreign policy realm. The more general query I have posited allows for a fuller response.

the matter from desultory comments in the instrumental portion of his speech.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Maecenas oration emphasizes the importance of determining political objectives that accord with human nature. Maecenas informs Octavian that he should not punish lawbreakers too severely, since men are congenitally inclined to wrongdoing (34.6). He further contends that Octavian ought not trust informants too readily; sordid motives may underlie their testimony (37.2–3).

The Maecenas address also mentions the importance of public opinion to a king's choice of goals. When deciding a particular course of action, it counsels, Octavian should contemplate whether his decision will ensure his subjects' affection or not; the ruler must choose options that will encourage the citizenry's esteem for him (38.2). This sentiment sits poorly with Dio's depiction of humanity's baseness: given Dio's cynicism about peoples' motivations, one might expect Octavian's subjects to admire him for ignoble reasons. Such a conclusion corresponds with some scholarly opinions of Dio's own thought; according to Reinhold, for instance, the historian's mix of Thucydidean pessimism and moral instruction sometimes fails to convince.<sup>65</sup>

Dio's Maecenas also suggests the importance of a ruler's advisors when one contemplates the correct course of action. A king makes superior decisions, he avers, when a talented team of counselors aid him (19.4–5). This will not hold true if the monarch fails to employ the “best” men as his guides. Such advice implies that a monarch ought not select objectives on his own. It remains fundamental, furthermore, for Octavian to offer the appearance of political plurality in his decision-making. Only in the case of commanders revolting from his authority should Octavian bypass the Senate's opinion and treat the rebels as public enemies (31.10). To Maecenas, a ruler must assess the danger of a situation and only choose an openly authoritarian solution when the circumstances are life threatening. When this fails to be the case, it is best for a king to present the illusion that he is not the state's ultimate authority. One again detects a discordant note: this Machiavellian contention may not mix well with the oration's emphasis on the monarch's strength of character.

<sup>64</sup> 52.19–40. On the division of the Maecenas oration into philosophical/epistemological and instrumental sections, see above.

<sup>65</sup> Reinhold 1988, 215: “Dio is not always consistent or convincing in applying his concept of human nature to historical events.” On this topic, see also Rich 1989, 91; Adler 2011a, 146–47.

*Dio's History.* The sentiments Dio's Maecenas offers appear compatible with those detectable elsewhere in his work. As scholars have long noted, Dio's history demonstrates deep concern for senatorial prerogatives.<sup>66</sup> Dio even lauds Maecenas for remaining an equestrian, despite his influence with Augustus (55.7.4). Thus the Maecenas speech's regard for senators' input in the decision-making process fits Dio's hierarchical conception of proper governance. The absence of advisors, Dio thought, courts disaster for a leader. According to the historian, for example, errors plagued Caracalla's reign because the emperor pertinaciously clung to his own opinions and failed to seek learned counsel (78[77]11.5).<sup>67</sup> Dio lauds Nerva for relying on the advice of foremost men (68[68].2.3). He even praises the early years of Tiberius' reign, because the emperor allowed the senators to deliberate on state affairs (57.7.2–6).<sup>68</sup> In other parts of his work, Dio also maintains that deliberation is a prerequisite for political success (fr. 32.15; fr. 54.1).<sup>69</sup> The Maecenas address' suggestion that Octavian offer mild punishments for lawbreakers (34.6), furthermore, echoes numerous pleas for clemency throughout the history.<sup>70</sup>

(I 2) *How are political goals pursued most effectively?*<sup>71</sup>

*The Maecenas Speech.* The Maecenas address posits a number of answers to this question. One key to the successful pursuit of political aims pertains to Maecenas' perception of the proper ordering of society. Dio's Maecenas offers the impression that a rigidly hierarchical social order is

<sup>66</sup>E.g., Swan 2004, 4: "Elitist to the core, Dio regarded the Senate, of which he was a senior member, as the universal ruling order, a caste defined by class, superior cultural attainments, and a lifelong public career." On the Maecenas speech's treatment of the Senate, see, e.g., Meyer 1891, 16–24; Jardé 1925, 29–32; Bleicken 1962, 457–67; van Stekelenburg 1971, 113–16; Espinosa Ruiz 1982, 489–90; Zawadzki 1983, 297–305; Reinhold 1988, 108; Steidle 1988, 209–11. At 79(78).40.3–41.4, Dio criticizes Macrinus for becoming emperor without having served in the Senate.

<sup>67</sup>Cf. Dio's criticism of Commodus on similar grounds (73[72].1.2).

<sup>68</sup>Dio asserts (57.13.6) that Germanicus' death marked Tiberius' turn from good to bad emperor. On Tiberius' early pro-senatorial policy, see also 57.15.8–9.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. fr. 70.4–9, where Dio praises Scipio Africanus' preparedness in war, which removed the necessity of deliberation. See also fr. 16, where Dio stresses the importance of solo deliberation.

<sup>70</sup>E.g., fr. 11.2–6; fr. 36.1–4; fr. 36.11–14; 43.15.3–16.1; 56.40.7. For a discussion of Dio's concern for clemency, see Adler 2011a.

<sup>71</sup>I have again slightly altered the original question George 1969, 211, posed: "How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?" George's query appears chiefly aimed at foreign affairs. The question's recasting permits a more general answer.

a prerequisite for effective political action, since it is well regimented and puts the management of state affairs in the hands of the most meritorious members. For this reason, the speech expatiates on the suitable administrative roles of various classes. Maecenas also advocates the regulation of state business along class lines. The oration opposes the amassing of power at court by freedmen (37.5–6)—men whose lowly station renders them unsuitable to play important roles in the conduct of affairs. In part to reinforce the hierarchical nature of this optimal monarchy, Maecenas supports state-run education for future senators and equestrians (26.1).<sup>72</sup> Only such men, as a result of their schooling, would possess the requisite background to take on weighty administrative roles.

Maecenas also contends that effective political action requires a ruler to select the noblest, wealthiest, and most capable citizens as advisors, magistrates, and underlings. The address recommends that Octavian personally appoint all senators (19.1) and equestrians (19.4) in order to ensure that the undeserving do not remain in their posts.<sup>73</sup> Further, it is beneficial for the government to have experienced agents involved in its administration (25.4).<sup>74</sup> Thus an essential aspect of effective political action for Maecenas pertains to an emperor surrounding himself with the best cast of characters. This policy has the added benefit of purportedly making the emperor safer, since this large and capable elite, having a share in government, will not rebel (cf. 19.4–6).

The speech associates successful political action with the character of the ruler. If the king proves frugal in his personal affairs and lavishes funds on the state, for instance, Maecenas argues that his subjects will gladly pay taxes (29.2–3). In essence, Octavian must be the sort of leader whom he would want ruling over him (39.2).<sup>75</sup> This emphasis on the emperor's temperament seems typical of Roman ruminations on political matters. As Edwards has argued, the Romans had a penchant for personalizing issues that we in the modern world tend to characterize in other ways.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> On this proposal, see Bleicken 1962, 462; Reinhold 1988, 197. According to Crook 1955, 126–27, Dio's Maecenas betrays Platonic influence in his concern for an appropriately trained administrative elite.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. 52.20.3, which reiterates the necessity of an emperor selecting subordinates with neither senatorial nor popular input. The same holds true, thinks Dio's Maecenas, in regard to the army: the hardest men ought to serve as professional soldiers, since they will prove the most effective fighters (52.27.4–5).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. 52.33.5.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. 52.34.1. According to Millar 1964, 111, these sorts of sentiments on the part of Dio's Maecenas are boilerplate.

<sup>76</sup> Edwards 1993, esp. 4.

It is thus unsurprising that Maecenas informs Octavian that the optimal ruler must be the best and have the best helpers (26.2).

More intriguingly, the oration equates local governance with effective management. This assessment, however, should not be confused with an endorsement of provincial autonomy; the oration—though the product of a distinguished member of the Empire's Greek elite—opposes local coinages and other manifestations of colonial self-rule (30.9).<sup>77</sup> Although an advocate for the centralization of the Imperial administration, Maecenas still stresses the value of the proximity of the state's agents to the affairs they manage. Thus he supports the parceling of Italy into smaller districts, each with its own administrator (22.6).<sup>78</sup> One must be mindful, he contends, not to grant responsibilities so large to governors that they cannot properly perform them. The same holds true, Maecenas believes, for the ruler himself. The emperor should never make full use of his power, nor desire to accomplish everything (38.1). The address suggests that political actions are most potently pursued when they remain manageable, and when the ruler has not accorded himself too many tasks. Maecenas perceives limits to what an emperor can reasonably achieve, despite his ultimate control of the state.

*Dio's History.* One can find echoes of many of these sentiments in other portions of Dio's history. We have already discussed Dio's abiding concern with the maintenance of senatorial perquisites. The historian also views education as an appropriate means to distinguish worthy members of the elite from the great unwashed. Dio, for instance, proves critical of Marcus Bassaeus Rufus, a praetorian prefect during the rule of Marcus Aurelius, for his paltry education (72[71].5.2); the historian rebukes Oclantius Adventus for the same reason (79[78].14.1–2). He informs us that a lack of educational attainments exposed a man falsely claiming to be the distinguished Sextus Quintillius Condianus (73[72].6.5), and Dio condemns Caracalla for proving contemptuous of the properly educated (78[77].13.6).<sup>79</sup>

The concern Dio's Maecenas demonstrates for the pursuit of modest political goals (38.1) fits with the historian's antirevolutionary temperament.<sup>80</sup> Especially in its early books, the *Historia Romana* places emphasis

<sup>77</sup> See, e.g., Zawadzki 1983, 310–11; Reinhold 1988, 203.

<sup>78</sup> On this topic, see Reinhold 1988, 192–94.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. 72(71).22.1, where Dio praises Marcus Aurelius' education.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. the sentiments found in fr. 12.3a, though this presumably stems from a speech Dio attributed to an historical personage.

on the value of σωφροσύνη (“moderation”). This quality, Dio argues, wins and preserves victories (fr. 32.14), and thus it remains exceedingly important to leaders (fr. 55.6).<sup>81</sup> Yet Dio also suggests that very few men can be good kings, since most cannot muster the condign judiciousness (fr. 12.9). This conclusion sits well with the cynicism we have detected in Dio’s political thought.

(I 3) *How are political risks calculated, controlled, and accepted?*<sup>82</sup>

*The Maecenas Speech.* Throughout the course of his speech, the “political risk” about which Dio’s Maecenas demonstrates the most concern is the possibility of a coup against the emperor. The oration addresses this topic in numerous places, seemingly to the exclusion of other potential uncertainties. Eliminating conspiracies and rebellions remains such a strong preoccupation on the part of Maecenas that it may tacitly demonstrate the power of Agrippa’s speech in favor of democracy.

Maecenas’ advice for curbing potential rebellions takes many forms. The speech stresses, for example, the importance of co-opting elites into the government; this will limit the number of potential figureheads for conspiracies (19.3). Maecenas also discusses the proper allotment of tasks to underlings: the granting of privileges too quickly (20.1) or the failure to divide weighty military and administrative roles (22.4, 23.2, 24.1–2) will prove dangerous. To promote Octavian’s safety, the address recommends the professionalization of the army, since this will ensure that only some of his subjects are armed (27.3).

The oration also highlights the value of prestige to the limiting of coups. Maecenas advises Octavian not to grant the traditional powers to magistrates but rather to preserve their dignity alone, while lessening their influence. This will confer status upon the office holders and simultaneously discourage rebellions (20.3). For the same reason, the oration suggests that Octavian pay salaries to a variety of administrators (21.7, 23.1, 25.1–2). Maecenas does not view such earnings as a means to encourage good work, but rather as a way of flattering the recipients. In contrast, Maecenas stresses that a ruler, unlike his subordinates, must not countenance honors for himself, since all he needs is power (35).

<sup>81</sup> Cf. 78(77).24.2, where Dio ridicules Caracalla for deeming himself σώφρων (“temperate”).

<sup>82</sup> Again I have slightly altered the original query posed by George 1969, 212: “How are the risks of political action calculated, controlled, and accepted?” As was the case with George’s version of I 1 and I 2, this seems to have been crafted with foreign affairs in mind.



Maecenas' advice about maintaining the false appearance of democracy seems similarly Machiavellian. Although an opponent of popular participation in governance (cf. 30.2), he sees value in offering the trappings of republicanism. The speech recommends, for instance, that foreign embassies visit the Senate—not because the Senate has any real power over foreign affairs, but rather because the august body lends dignity to the proceedings (31.1). Although Maecenas aims to offer the Senate a judicial and legislative role of some sort,<sup>83</sup> the oration makes clear that senatorial legislation requires approval from the emperor (cf. 32.1, 33.3); the emperor, for example, has the right to appeal all senatorial judgments (33.1). According to Maecenas, then, a ruler lessens political risks by humoring elites into believing that they possess more power and freedom than is in fact the case.

*Dio's History.* Dio offers similar sentiments in other places in his history. For example, he praises the Roman king Tarquinius Priscus for ascribing all political successes to others, rather than taking credit himself (fr. 9.2). When assessing Lucullus' shortcomings as a general, Dio relates that he failed to understand the importance of conferring honors and money on underlings (36.16.2). He also makes clear that a leader should avoid personal blandishments. Thus he stresses the dangerousness of Caesar's acceptance of numerous honors during his dictatorship (44.7.4). He likewise deems Domitian's desire to be flattered τοῦτο δεινότατον ("this most awful characteristic," 67[67].4.2), and he criticizes Didius Julianus for having bronze statues of him built (74[73].14.2a). In all, Dio's history echoes the concerns about flattery that his Maecenas voices.

(I 4) *What is the best "timing" to advance one's interests?*<sup>84</sup>

*The Maecenas Speech.* Unfortunately, the Maecenas oration does not much discuss matters of timing, and this renders I 4 the only instrumental question from George's arsenal for which the speech does not offer substantive answers. To the limited extent that the speech addresses this topic, it chiefly focuses on one issue—the proper *cursus honorum* for

<sup>83</sup> Cf. 52.31.2, 9, 32.1–3. The precise role the address accords to the Senate remains a matter of contention among modern scholars. This is unsurprising, since this is key to intuiting Dio's purported attitude toward the Empire. See above, n. 66.

<sup>84</sup> This is an alteration of the original question George 1969, 215, posed: "What is the best 'timing' of action to advance one's interests?" George's query appears attuned to foreign affairs.

aspiring magistrates.<sup>85</sup> Dio's Maecenas also mentions the importance of quick resolutions to disputes between private citizens (37.9–10), presumably because this will lead to less civil strife, and thus less danger for the monarch. This sentiment, however, does not tell us much. Overall, the speech concentrates little attention on the proper timing of the emperor's decisions, in part because the oration only sparingly addresses the topic of foreign policy.

*Dio's History.* Dio's brief conclusion to the Agrippa-Maecenas debate, however, presents us with far more information on this score. Although convinced by Maecenas' words, Dio informs us, Octavian chose not to put all his suggestions into effect immediately, since he feared that such a drastic and sudden alteration could meet with failure; instead, Octavian gradually enacted some of Maecenas' proposed reforms, leaving still others to his successors (52.41.1–2). This support for modest and incremental modifications appears to fit with Dio's aversion to revolutionary change (cf. fr. 12.3a). When men involve themselves in too many undertakings, Dio elsewhere notes, they inevitably become overwhelmed (fr. 21.1). But Dio also believes that leaders should not wait too long to enact their plans.<sup>86</sup> Instead, he supports incremental action.

(I 5) *What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one's interests?*

*The Maecenas Speech.* It is striking how much the "interests" Dio's Maecenas addresses throughout the speech revolve around the emperor's safety. Almost every concern the speech enumerates appears at least partly related to the personal security of the emperor. Even the splitting up of Italy into smaller administrative units, which Maecenas justifies on grounds of effectiveness (22.6), can be viewed as a means of dividing governmental tasks amongst subordinates so as not to threaten the ruler. Maecenas also cautions against entrusting too many troops to an individual underling's command (22.4). He recommends that pro-magistrates not receive long terms of service, since this can lead to rebellions (23.2–3). Throughout the address, Maecenas perceives the importance of spreading power among a large group of office holders and of maintaining a strict *cursus honorum*, which will require these subordinates to prove themselves before they

<sup>85</sup> On the *cursus honorum* in the Maecenas address, see Millar 1964, 112–13.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. 44.15.2–3, where Dio criticizes the conspirators against Caesar for their over-long delay.

are entrusted with further powers. One means of guaranteeing a leader's interests, it seems, is to test underlings with increasingly large tasks and never to grant them commands that are dangerously powerful.

This is not the only means to protect the emperor mentioned in the oration. According to Maecenas, the ruler must also spend money wisely. Although an emperor ought to live frugally (29.3) and should not disperse funds lavishly throughout the Empire (30.3, 7), Maecenas suggests the necessity of large expenditures for the city of Rome, since this will instill respect in the state's allies and fear in her enemies (30.1). Thus the proper use of funds plays a role in advancing Octavian's interests. The same holds true, argues Maecenas, for disenfranchising the masses. Although the speech offers at least a minor decision-making role to senators and equestrians, it counsels against the use of popular votes for any purpose (cf. 20.3, 30.2). The emperor can co-opt the elite to follow his wishes (cf. 19.3); popular participation in government will lead to civil strife. Maecenas also sees the need for the emperor to take more extreme measures to ensure his safety: the address supports, for example, the removal of sorcerers and other subversives from the state (36.3–4).<sup>87</sup>

Such Machiavellian tactics may not sit well with another means Maecenas recommends for Octavian to advance his interests. The ruler, he suggests, should both act and think in the manner he would desire of his subjects (34.1). To Maecenas, Octavian's upstanding conduct would serve as a way to maintain control over the government. Readers may perceive that this unabashed moralizing amounts to an incongruous sentiment in an oration that elsewhere exhorts Octavian to lie about his status as a king (40) and to mislead subjects into disbelieving that they are slaves (19.4–5). Yet the speech's overall message is a moral one: act like a beneficent monarch and Octavian will safely bask in his citizenry's love (39.2–5).

*Dio's History.* One detects echoes of some of these points in disparate places in Dio's history. As we have demonstrated above, Dio displays keen interest in the role of the Senate in state affairs. Thus, for instance, he praises Hadrian for conducting crucial public business with the aid of the Senate and the state's foremost men (69[69].7.1). This concern for the maintenance of senatorial perquisites coincides with an aversion to popular participation in governance. Dio, for example, condemns Pertinax

<sup>87</sup> Cf. 52.37.2–4, however, where Dio's Maecenas warns Octavian not to trust implicitly informants who keep watch on potential subversives.

for failing to stymie Roman mobs in the aftermath of Commodus' assassination (74[73].2).<sup>88</sup> Overall, he shows deep regard for emperors sharing tasks with subordinates and demonstrates similar concern for the pedigree of those deemed fit to serve as their assistants.<sup>89</sup> Dio also focuses attention on the removal of astrologers, philosophers, and kindred men from the city of Rome;<sup>90</sup> it seems reasonable to connect this concern with the pronouncement Maecenas makes in this regard (36.3–4).

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

Having posed responses to George's queries, we can now suggest a few conclusions. The preceding examination allows us to weigh in on the widespread scholarly disagreement about the relationship between the Agrippa and Maecenas addresses. As mentioned above, most classicists have contended that Dio intended the Agrippa speech to serve as an intentionally weak springboard for Maecenas' response; some recent scholarship, however, asserts that both orations include elements of Dio's political sentiments. Our analysis demonstrates that the Agrippa address contains assessments compatible with premises Dio supports elsewhere in his history. The speech maintains, for instance, a pessimistic, Thucydidean outlook on human nature;<sup>91</sup> if anything, it, like the Maecenas oration, appears even gloomier about human motivations than was the great Athenian historian.<sup>92</sup> More fundamentally, we can say that the oration Dio attributed to Agrippa is based on the same philosophical foundations as the Maecenas speech. The two addresses' answers to P 1–P 5 are virtually identical. Both consider the political universe inherently conflict-ridden; both prove largely pessimistic about the realization of fundamental political values; and both deem their preferred form of government superior

<sup>88</sup> Cf. 56.40.4, where Dio's Tiberius supports Augustus' transferal of the people's power to the courts.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. 49.13.4, where Dio relates that Octavian realized a general should not give in to pressure from his soldiers and act contrary to his judgment. Such men, it seems, do not make for appropriate advisors. See also 78(77).13.6, which mentions that the detested Caracalla always regarded the soldiers as superior to senators. At 79(78).13.1, Dio criticizes the appointment of soldiers to consular status.

<sup>90</sup> E.g., 49.43.5; 57.15.8–9; 65(66).13.1; 67(67).13.1–3.

<sup>91</sup> For discussions of Thucydides' influence on Dio, see, e.g., Manuwald 1979, 282–84; Ameling 1984, 130–31; Aalders 1986, 293–94; Rich 1989, 88; Freyburger-Galland 1997, 18–19. On Dio's stylistic borrowings from Thucydides in the debate, see Kyhntzsch 1894, 31–45.

<sup>92</sup> For references to recent scholarly discussion of Thucydides' perception of human nature, see above, n. 37.

TABLE. Simplified Charts of Dio's Operational Code

Philosophical Questions					
	(P 1) Nature of political life	(P 2) Prospects for realizing political aspirations	(P 3) Predictability of future	(P 4) Control over historical development	(P 5) Role of chance
Agrippa Speech:	Conflictual.	Bad in monarchy; somewhat better in democracy.	Predictable, especially in forecasting failure.	Monarch: none; democratic leader: possibly some.	Some unspecified role.
Maecenas Speech:	Conflictual.	Bad in democracy; somewhat better in monarchy.	Predictable, especially in forecasting failure.	Democratic leader: none; monarch: possibly some.	Some unspecified role.
Dio's History:	Conflictual.	Bad in any regime type.	Unpredictable, but failure is often inevitable.	Little in any regime type.	An important but inconsistent role.
Instrumental Questions					
	(I 1) Best approach for selecting political goals	(I 2) Effective pursuit of political goals	(I 3) Calculation, control, and acceptance of political risks	(I 4) Best timing to advance interests	(I 5) Utility and role of different means
Maecenas Speech:	With help of the best advisors.	Limited political goals with help of the best advisors.	Divide power well among subordinates; confer prestige on them.	Insufficient evidence from speech.	Disallow popular participation in affairs.
Dio's History:	With help of the best advisors.	Limited political goals with help of the best advisors.	Confer prestige on subordinates.	Enact changes incrementally and modestly.	Disallow popular participation in affairs.

because it alone would purportedly allow Octavian to gain great control over historical development.

To some extent, the correspondence in epistemological foundations between the orations results from the dialogue's agonistic character: one speaker makes a charge, and his interlocutor naturally responds in kind. Yet such a dialogue does not require that both advisors possess identical philosophical worldviews. In a more realistic debate, an advisor might maintain that, say, a leader's freedom of action is a crucial means to test the value of a given political system, and the other might fundamentally disagree. But this is not what Dio offers in the Agrippa-Maecenas dialogue. Rather, the two speakers demonstrate that virtually identical philosophical underpinnings inform their views on governance—regardless of the conclusions they draw.

This does not imply that both speeches completely reflect Dio's normative political views. But it does suggest an effort on Dio's part to present sound arguments on both sides of the debate, based on epistemological premises the historian deemed solid. Such a conclusion supports the outlook of Espinosa Ruiz and others who perceived that Dio's political messages must be discovered from a combination of the two speeches.<sup>93</sup> If Dio had aimed to craft a weak Agrippa address, he likely would have grounded it in philosophical assessments the historian considered wrong-headed, such as a more optimistic view of human nature that allows for effective self-governance. Instead, as we have seen, he chose to present a brief in favor of democracy compatible with epistemological views one finds throughout Dio's history. Scholars assessing the dialogue should not discount the sentiments found in the Agrippa speech, even though it favors a course of action untenable in the historian's own day. Perhaps Dio's outlook on the Roman Empire was similar to a view Tacitus offers in the *Agricola* (2.3): the best government lies in between the two extremes of license and slavery.<sup>94</sup> In his postmortem estimation of Rome's first emperor, after all, Dio himself contends that the Romans loved Augustus in part because his rule combined monarchy and democracy (56.43.4).

Such a conclusion seems compatible with another idea key to Dio's conception of politics: the importance of moderation. The concern Dio demonstrates for self-restraint—especially in the earlier books of his history—may be of a piece with his regard for governmental moderation. In

<sup>93</sup> See above, n. 25. This also suggests that Alonso-Núñez 1984 unfairly dismissed Espinosa Ruiz 1982.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *Ag.* 3.1, where Tacitus discusses the erstwhile incompatibility of the principate and *libertas*, until the reign of Nerva, who mixed the two.

both cases, Dio—a staunch opponent of revolutionary change—prefers a state that is neither too democratic, nor too autocratic. Hence, for example, Dio praises the purportedly “democratic” aspects of Caligula’s (59.3.1) and Pertinax’s (74[73].3.4) reigns.<sup>95</sup>

This hints at Dio’s shifting conception of democracy throughout his history. As Kuhlmann has noted, Dio’s Agrippa speech at least largely defends Greek-style democracy, rather than the government of the Roman Republic.<sup>96</sup> We need not follow Kuhlmann, however, in presuming that this was the result of Herodotean influence on the Agrippa-Maecenas debate. In fact, Dio regularly—and misleadingly—labels the Roman Republic a “democracy” throughout his history.<sup>97</sup> He may have employed this description as a sort of shorthand. Dio often identifies a monarchical government as “democratic” if its leader allows for some degree of senatorial input on affairs.<sup>98</sup> As a proponent of a “mixed” constitution, he may have aimed to use the Agrippa-Maecenas debate in part to present philosophical defenses of both democracy and monarchy. Although the Maecenas speech proffers a more realistic response to the vicissitudes of the high Empire, Dio may have deemed it valuable to remind his readers—who lived under increasingly autocratic emperors—of some benefits associated with democratic governance.

More generally, our examination has demonstrated how thoroughly Dionian *both* speeches are. They appear consistent with aspects of the historian’s own intellectual predilections. Even the instrumental portion of the Maecenas address remains compatible with Dio’s penchant for pessimism and is peppered with the moralistic apothegms one typically finds in his other speeches. One also detects in the debate a tension between these twin aspects of this thought.<sup>99</sup>

This tension between Dio’s cynical outlook on human nature and a preference for moralistic solutions to political problems seems most palpable in regard to the figure of the emperor. Although both the Agrippa and Maecenas addresses highlight the congenital malignity of human beings, Maecenas’ advice to Octavian hinges on the emperor himself avoiding the moral pitfalls Dio elsewhere associates with humanity as

<sup>95</sup> Cf. 50.1.2, where Dio remarks that Antony’s and Octavian’s jockeying for power reduced the Romans to slavery.

<sup>96</sup> Kuhlmann 2010, 110. See also Aalders 1986, 296–97.

<sup>97</sup> E.g., 36.32.1; 45.44.2; 47.39; 50.1.1; 53.1.3; 53.11.2, 17.3, 11; 55.21.4. Cf. 43.45.1; 47.42.3.

<sup>98</sup> E.g., 56.41.3, 43.4; 57.15.8–9; 59.3.1. See also 56.40.3; 57.7.2–6; 59.20.4. At 56.33.4, Dio discusses Augustus’ recommendations for his successors, which argue against the emperor’s autocratic control of public business, since this would be the mark of a tyranny.

<sup>99</sup> On this topic, see above, n. 37.

a whole. Thus, according to the Maecenas oration, men innately crave prestige, but the emperor must resist this temptation (35). Others remain naturally inclined to misbehave, but the emperor must always conduct himself in an upright manner (34.1). Dio's deep regard for a hierarchical society leads him implicitly to contend that human nature only affects the great unwashed: elite senators do not suffer from the vices inherent among the populace.<sup>100</sup> But perhaps Dio only fully disregards the supposedly base realities of human nature for the emperor himself. Even senators and equestrians require flattery and the false appearance of power to remain loyal to the government.

In many ways, the philosophical portions of both speeches demonstrate the ways in which Dio's Thucydidean realism trumps his occasional inclination to offer moralistic sentiments.<sup>101</sup> The two addresses portray the political universe as rife with conflict and see enemies lurking everywhere. Both orations—when taken together—also underscore the dim prospects a leader faces when attempting to realize his political goals. This may serve to make readers conclude that the speeches' morally tinged arguments appear unrealistic and naïve. And this gives us more reason to suspect that Dio aimed for his audience to take both the Agrippa and Maecenas addresses seriously. After all, the combination of the Agrippa and Maecenas speeches reinforces a sense of gloom detectable in Dio's history as a whole.

All this underscores the pessimistic character of much of Dio's political thought. Although Swan suggests that "Human nature is the most important single source of evil in Dio's generally friendly universe,"<sup>102</sup> the preceding pages have demonstrated that this is too rosy an estimation. According to Swan, as Dio sees matters, "It was open to human agents to second heaven's purpose or to resist it."<sup>103</sup> But Dio makes clear that people—through no fault of their own—could not always divine heaven's purpose;<sup>104</sup> further, the historian's conception of the gods' role in terrestrial affairs seems inconsistent. At times Dio portrays fortune as capricious and notes that heaven does not always—or even often—favor the just.

<sup>100</sup> This view may have a Thucydidean precedent. See, e.g., Lebow 2003, 70: "He [Thucydides] repeatedly contrasts the *demos*, the majority of citizens who pursue primarily selfish ends, with the *dunatoi*, influential political men more likely to govern in the interests of the *polis*."

<sup>101</sup> On Thucydides as the forefather of the realist and neo-realist schools of international relations, see, e.g., Johnson Bagby 1994; Kokaz 2001.

<sup>102</sup> Swan 2004, 12.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>104</sup> E.g., 67(67).12.1. See the section discussing P 5 above.



Cynical appraisals of human nature and public life dominate Dio's political discussions and asides. In comparison with them, Dio's contentions about the role of fortune and divine will seem erratic and uneven. His does not appear to be an especially "friendly universe."

Dio's conception of human nature also speaks to other similarities between his Agrippa and Maecenas orations. We have noted that Dio's speakers both largely contend that the political future is predictable. To some extent, this must relate to the character of the debate itself. It obviously remains difficult to counsel a particular course of action if one has no sense of what its repercussions may be. But the dialogue's stressing of the predictability of later events also seems to accord with Dio's own perception of human nature, which maintains that human motivations are fixed. This disparaging view of his fellow men may have compelled Dio to stress the inevitability of future events.

Another prominent element in the Maecenas oration could reinforce a sense of pessimism in the debate. The answers of the Maecenas speech to I 3 and I 5 together demonstrate that it is preoccupied with the ruler's safety, to the point of minimizing other potential political risks. This could (unwittingly?) reinforce the contentions of Dio's Agrippa about the dangers of monarchy and gainsay some of the strength of Maecenas' plea. Despite Maecenas' best efforts, it may appear more difficult to establish a stable monarchy than his address contends. Given Dio's aversion to radical change, we should not be surprised if the historian underscores this impression in his dialogue. It seems striking, moreover, that in a debate over a preferable system of governance, Dio focuses so little attention on the proper ends and goals of government in general.

Interestingly, the Maecenas oration does not see imperialism and colonialism as appropriate political goals, instead viewing them as the unfortunate result of the factionalism and civil strife inherent to democracies (15.4). We have reason to believe Dio did not completely agree with this contention: at other points in his work, the historian attributes Roman conquest during the Imperial period to emperors' desire for renown (68[68].17.1; 75[75].1.1). Thus Dio did not see democratic in-fighting as completely responsible for Roman expansionism. Yet the Maecenas oration's broader impression of imperialism appears to sit well with its author's views on the topic. The historian, in fact, has sprinkled his history with a surprising number of anti-imperialist sentiments.<sup>105</sup> According

<sup>105</sup> E.g., 69(69).5.1; 72(71).22.1, 24.1; 74(73).17.6; 75(75).3.2–3. Cf. 78(77).3.2, where Dio ridicules Caracalla due to the emperor's affection for Alexander the Great. See also Dio's Boudica speech (62[62].3–6), which focuses on the injustices associated with Roman

to Swan, Dio opposed military adventurism because he believed that chance played a significant part in its outcome.<sup>106</sup> But we have seen that Dio stresses fortune's role in numerous matters, and this, on its own, does not imply that they are unworthy goals. Further, the historian was certainly no pacifist (cf. fr. 8.1). It seems more likely that Dio's criticism of imperialism stems from his aversion to military men rising to positions of political prominence.<sup>107</sup> Our examination has demonstrated that Dio jealously guarded senatorial prerogatives. Since military adventurism increased the importance of the Roman army at the expense of the Senate, this was sufficient grounds for his opposition to it.

Further conclusions about Dio's political proclivities would come to light from analyses of other ancient authors' operational codes. Are the philosophical and instrumental beliefs detectable in the Agrippa-Maecenas debate typical of figures from the mid-Imperial period? Are they similar to those of other writers from the Empire's Greek elite? Future forays into OCA should offer insights into these and kindred topics. Cicero's letters, Dio Chrysostom's political orations, and the pseudo-Sallustian *Epistulae ad Caesarem senem* come to mind as useful conduits for this approach, though undoubtedly other classical works would prove similarly productive.<sup>108</sup> Studies of such writers would allow scholars to offer comparative assessments of ancient perceptions of grand strategy and could possibly underscore the unique assessments of domestic and foreign policy of various ancient authors. Comparative analysis of disparate leaders' operational codes has proved fruitful for political scientists; it may prove equally so for classical scholars.<sup>109</sup>

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colonialism. On this speech, and, more generally, Dio's views of imperialism, see Adler 2011b, 141–61.

<sup>106</sup> Swan 2004, 12.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, 78(77).3.2, 8.1–2, 13.6, 17.1–2; 79(78).13.1; 80(79).3.5–4.2.

<sup>108</sup> Through OCA, we could more systematically assess, for example, whether Dio's political views “display a remarkable conformity with those of other Greek authors of imperial times,” as Aalders 1986, 302, suggests. Cf. Gabba 1955, 320, who links Dio's support for monarchy to the zeitgeist of Rome in the second century C.E.

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